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Cuba Must Be Free

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THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE AIR

CUBA MUST BE FREE

WHY DO WE HESITATE?

BY

CHARLES HENRY BUTLER

OF THE NEW YORK BAR

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A.P.S.

CUBA MUST BE FREE

In a little book recently published, entitled "The Real Condition of Cuba To-day," the author, Mr. Stephen Bonsal, describes at length an interview between himself and a Spaniard who had settled in Cuba but was, heart and soul, a "Peninsular" and an ardent admirer of Captain-General Weyler. This man was unable to comprehend how the insurgents, as he called the followers of Gomez, could maintain their struggle for independence in the face of the tremendous odds against them, and declared that the only possible way for Spain to retain her sovereignty over Cuba was to crush out by every means possible the contagion and dreams of Cuba Libre. "What the contagion is," he said, "I do not know. **It is something in the air these Cubans breathe.** No one is safe from the infection. Every day I hold my breath as my half-grown boys set out for school, and wonder if they too will start for the long grass."

Unconsciously the Spaniard struck the keynote of the whole situation when he uttered those few words—"It is something in the air"—and while in his own heart no responsive chord thrilled at their sound, to us they convey all the meaning of an axiomatic truth.

It would be hard, indeed, to explain those words to a thoroughgoing Spaniard, because he could never grasp the full extent and meaning of what the "something" is that the Cuban patriots breathe; but it would be even more difficult to explain them to an American, for they would be

understood so fully and so quickly from their mere mention that an attempt to define that "something" would be as futile as an attempt to demonstrate one of the self-evident propositions of Euclid.

Yes, indeed! we well know what that "something" is. We cannot exactly enumerate all of its component parts, formulate an analysis, as it were, but we recognize it as the same "something" that was in the air when the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock and the Huguenots disembarked on Carolina's shore. Samuel Adams and the Boston Mohawks, whom he inspired with that fiery zeal that gave him the title of Father of the Revolution, sniffed it in the air one wintry night on Griffin's Wharf, and in the morning Paul Revere's horse sped the faster for it as he rode post-haste to tell the Philadelphia Quakers how well taxed tea could mix with the salt water of Boston Harbor; Warren and his men felt it at Bunker Hill; it sustained Washington and his poorly clad, and still more poorly fed, army through the dark and dreary winter of camp-life at Valley Forge; for Marion and his men it was the sauce that made their scanty diet of potatoes richer by far than the well-spread table of the British officers. It was in the air he breathed, but his own nature had fallen so low that he could not appreciate it, when Arnold became a traitor, although he, too, had felt it at Saratoga and Quebec.

It animated the meetings of the Federal convention which framed the Constitution which has been the compass and the anchor-chain of our country, as it also animated the conventions of the separate States which ratified it.

It was in the air again when, in defiance of our nation's rights, ships sailing under our flag were

overhauled and searched by English frigates, and it was shaped in Lawrence's last breath into the words, "Don't give up the ship," and though his gallant fight and noble death could not save the fated Chesapeake, in how many battles since the one on Lake Erie, when Perry hung those words on his banner as a signal, have they been the watch-words that have victoriously enabled us to say: "We have met the enemy, and they are ours!"

It showed itself in all its pristine vigor, after it had, perhaps, lain dormant for a while, when, danger no longer threatening us from without, did threaten us from within, and then it was that "something" in the air filled every heart and mind with loyalty and strength.

The whole world felt it when it guided the pen of Lincoln and emancipation became a fact, and it was known that this land was not only the home of the free but of the free alone.

It marched with Sherman to the sea, and bound Farragut closer to the mast at the battle of Mobile Bay than the ropes that lashed him there.

It filled the hearts of others with a zeal and loyalty for their own State flags that, whether mistaken or not, was still akin to that which filled our own, and alike gave strength and glory to Sheridan and Stonewall Jackson, to Grant and Robert Lee, and rendered them invincible excepting to each other.

Is it any wonder that we know what that something is in the air that the Cubans breathe?

But while it is an element peculiar to the air of this western hemisphere, our land is not the only one where something in the air has filled it with hate of tyrants and with love of freedom.

England recognized it after her experiences of

1776 to 1783, and by giving it full swing has been able to retain her great colonial possessions of Canada, the Northwest, Bermuda, and Jamaica, who in full western freedom and strength are ever loyal and true to their parent land.

Spain, on the other hand, has always refused, as she always will, to recognize it, until colony by colony, she has lost all those great possessions of North America, Mexico, Central and South America, that once extended from our Southern States to La Plata—all except Cuba and Porto Rico—and those she is as sure to lose in the near future as it is sure that the others have already been lost, and from the same cause also.

That same "something" in the air the Cubans breathe, was felt by Mexico in 1811, and sustained her in a struggle that lasted for eleven years, and finally resulted in her freedom.

It filled the hearts of Bolivar and his men, and Venezuela was, and ever since has been, self-governed.

Belgrano on the plains of La Plata felt its influence when he drove from his country the cursed Morello, apt imitator of Alva and prototype of Weyler, and then the Argentine Republic sprang into existence with a strength and vigor that has excited the wonder and admiration of the world.

The other provinces of South and Central America were stirred up to demand their freedom, and finally the Emperor of Brazil was forced to abdicate his throne, and the great Brazilian Republic now includes an area almost as great as the United States.

Not on the continent alone has its influence been felt, but it was strong enough to cross to Hayti and San Domingo, who also broke their chains of slavery.

And so to-day, from the North Pole to Patagonia, freedom and liberty control the whole hemisphere, excepting Cuba and Porto Rico.

And why to Cuba only should this great boon be denied? Why should she alone be singled out as the one territory from which Eastern despotism and control cannot be rooted out?

It seems as though that fated island had been reserved as a sort of monarchical park in the western hemisphere, in which all the ancient relics of tributary servitude should be forever preserved, in order that the whole world may know what great improvement has been made in the march of civilization toward perfect government, by comparing the happy lot of the Western World with the present condition of Cuba—something similar to our National Yellowstone and Yosemite Parks, but in which, instead of relics of barbarity, we preserve from the destruction necessarily incident to increasing population nature's greatest wonders, in order that all the world for all time may know how grand our country has ever been.

And has America never taken part in any of these struggles outside the limits of her own territory? Yes, at times—but seldom.

In 1818, while the Spanish-American provinces were battling for liberty, that same element in the air they breathed stirred our hearts also to some extent, and most of all it touched the soul of the great Kentuckian, Henry Clay, who, in the noblest flight of oratory that ever burst from his heart, urged the House of Representatives to then recognize those struggling sister states as free and independent. But it was not until several years afterward and not until the peace of Paris, in which all the other European nations joined, and Spain was

forced to grant her provinces the freedom they themselves had won, that we finally recognized them. And Carl Schurz tells us, in his "Life of Henry Clay," that his great sympathy for those States while they fought for the same liberty that we had achieved through the aid of allies stronger than ourselves when we were weak, cost him the presidency of this country, for the people feared that, in his zeal for them, he might involve us in a war with—Spain!

In 1818, when the same question was agitating this country in regard to those provinces that is now being discussed in regard to Cuba, their united population was less than twenty millions, while now it exceeds fifty millions; their total commerce with this country, Brazil included, was small indeed compared to the two hundred millions of to-day.

And yet we still tell Cuba Libre that we cannot recognize her; that we must stand by and see the yoke of servitude bound on our brother's neck, although in our hearts we know that island should be free. And why does the United States refuse to recognize that freedom? Why does it even hesitate? Every President has declared that it should be done and that it would be done.

Cuba will be free. She must be free. Her independence must be acknowledged, acknowledged speedily, and should be first of all by these United States.

Why not Cuba free, as well as Venezuela, Peru, or Ecuador? Why is her case any different from that of Chili or Brazil?

Read the arguments against the freedom of the Spanish-American provinces in 1818, and they vary incidentally only, and not in general, from the arguments advanced against the freedom of Cuba.

The same scenes were enacted, the same conditions existed then, as to the nature of the population, lawlessness, cheapness of life, and disregard of property, that exist to-day in Cuba, and would still be enacted and exist in those provinces to-day had Spain continued in possession, with power to harass and to destroy.

And yet to-day each one of those provinces is a self-governed republic with whom we maintain friendly, cordial, and profitable relations both diplomatic and commercial.

The termination of Spanish rule wrought the change in those countries, resulting in opening their ports to the commerce of the world; in inviting to their shores a better and stronger class of emigrants; and stopping the extortion, such as is practised to-day in Cuba, permitted the revenues from taxation to be expended in self-improvement instead of for a government thousands of miles away, that cared for its colonies only for the treasure that could be wrung from them for the support of a tottering monarchy or an unstable so-called republic.

With her population thrice decimated by pestilence, by famine and by war, and with all her energies paralyzed by the clutch of the terrible iron hand of Spain, which once in its might was so strong to grasp and to wield, but now is only able by its weight to crush and oppress, Cuba, weary and dejected, sits amidst the ashes of her fair plantations once yielding their sweetness to the entire world, but now devastated by

fire and the sword. But will any one—can any one—deny that when once that iron hand shall have been removed that with lungs expanding with liberty achieved and with the strength acquired in her seventy years' struggle for freedom, Cuba will rise again in her grandeur, and once more become the Ever Faithful Isle, this time faithful not to any Eastern monarch, but to the principles of the freedom for which she has struggled, and which will ever bear her upward and onward toward the goal of national perfection, which can only be reached by a steadfast purpose and consistent action which are impossible except under a just system of self-government, controlled only by self-respect.

And in this upward course, aided by her natural advantages of location and fertility, she may yet outstrip her older sisters, who, though they married, as it were, and left the parental home long ago, found no such glorious portion as that which, after all her tears and miseries are ended, may yet await this Cinderella of the Spanish household!

Cuba's liberty is sure. Her sons and daughters have felt that "something" in the air, and, as we know so well, when once it has been felt no power on earth can overcome it, and all the forces of heaven will aid it, even as the stars in their courses fought for the victory of Deborah over Sisera, the oppressor of Israel.

But—is that "something" still in the air we breathe? Are we still thrilled by the same emotions that once stirred our hearts when we heard of humanity struggling for that freedom of which we are so proud? Has a hundred years of prosperity so diluted that element in the air, or has it so weakened our own perceptions, that our lungs

no longer expand as broadly as before? Has the "something" in the air that once could not fail to be felt in every heart and at every time "petered out," as they say of mines which, after making their owners millionaires, have suddenly and forever ceased to pay expenses? Or is it that what we once so proudly called patriotism and love of fellow-man was after all nothing but merely idealized selfishness?

Is no helping hand to be stretched across the sea? Have the same elements which in the crisis of thirty years ago produced a Lincoln for ourselves no power at this time to create a Lafayette for Cuba? Have we forgotten that it was the true George Washington whose heart was always stirred within him when he heard of any other nation's struggles for the liberty that we achieved for ourselves. Have we never considered as applicable to ourselves the words of the Grand Old Man who for so many years controlled the destiny of our friendly ally across the seas when he warned his people in his letter on Armenia that they must shake off the incubus known as the Control of Europe and remember that now, as in the days of old, England has an existence, a character and a duty of her own.

Why do we hesitate? Are we afraid; and if so, afraid of what? Can it be that we are afraid of war; and if so, with whom?

With a power that, after keeping one of her provinces within a hundred miles of our shore under martial law the most oppressive that the world has ever seen, in an absolutely unavailing effort to suppress her avowed longing for freedom, now threatens us with war, as it has ever done throughout this and other similar struggles for liberty on the part of her provinces, if for-

sooth we extend to suffering humanity within reach even a friendly grasp of the hand ;—

With a power that has violated every provision of the existing treaty between it and ourselves, by not only murdering our citizens, but also by burning their plantations, confiscating their property, and imprisoning them on suspicion, without the formalities of trial, expressly provided ;—

With a power that, not satisfied with massacring the captain and fifty-two of the passengers of the Virginius, flying our flag, also desired the death of her entire complement and only desisted under threats of bombardment, not from ourselves, but from a commander of a friendly ally who assumed to represent the interest of all humanity and civilization ;—

With a power that, while the whole world stood aghast at the enormity of that crime against the law of nations, of nature, and of God (unparalleled except once, and that within a month), and which it itself afterward in solemn convention admitted to be wholly indefensible, permitted under its official sanction a bull-fight to be tendered to the brutal Burriel, who acted as Butcher-in-chief at that carnival of slaughter, as a token of appreciation for his share in the perpetration of an act which the whole world condemned while Havana and Madrid applauded ;—

With a power that for the last thirty years notwithstanding that peace existed, has in direct violations of treaty rights captured and searched vessels sailing under our flag on the high seas in the same manner that England did in the early part of this century and forced us into the War of 1812, and who in committing these unlawful acts has accompanied them with such lawlessness and cruelty that Secretary Evarts stated in a despatch

to Minister Lowell, that the accounts given thereof in the press, had so far from being exaggerated been absolutely minimized;—

With a power which in utter disregard of the rights of American citizenship, which we have been led to believe are sacred the whole wide world around, has bid defiance to us at every opportunity, and has practically warned our citizens from the city in their province, which is nearest to our own land, and with which necessarily we are closely bound commercially; and in this respect has made it possible to say that the life of an American citizen is safe in any part of the world except where flies the flag of Spain;—

With a power that has discriminated against our commerce, steadily and effectually, imposing fines upon, and even confiscating our merchant-vessels and their cargoes, as evidenced by the cases of the Masonic, Ocean Pearl, and others too numerous to mention, until our merchants prefer to trade with ports of any country in the world save those of Spain;—

With a power under whose government have been perpetrated not only the outrages upon Michaelson, Delgado, the crew of the Competitor, and Dr. Ruiz, whose misfortunes we are familiar with, but on hundreds of American citizens, the records of whose wrongs can only be found in the archives of our State Department;—

With a power against whom we have to-day claims pending for treaty violations by nearly two hundred of our citizens and aggregating nearly twenty million dollars; and which bankrupt at home and creditless abroad is now seeking by pledging the very palace in which it lives to obtain money wherewith it may retain the Island which four hundred years ago Columbus discov-

ered by means of the money raised by Isabella's pawning the jewels;—

With a power that in the last few days has shown that all its crimes heretofore committed are but venial when compared with the crime of horror for which it is responsible, for undoubtedly to that power is due directly or indirectly the destruction of the Maine in Havana harbor; a crime against man, against the law of nations and of nature, so deep, so foul, that no pen of man can ever, or should ever, attempt to describe it. The genius that could describe it fully does not exist, thank God, for if it did it would drive men mad;—

With a power that not only has defied and treated other nations as it has our own, but which has treated its own subjects with cruelty and oppression and makes it an act of war against herself on the part of any nation even to extend their sympathy.

Why do we hesitate?

To-day—for these thoughts have crystallized themselves into words on a calm Sabbath day—ten, yes, a hundred—thousand ministers of the Gospel in this Christian land are lifting up their voices in prayer that this country may be spared the horrors of a war and enjoy the blessings of peace; and as those fervent prayers have risen from the pulpit millions of heartfelt amens echoed from the pews beneath, have borne them on their upward way, and laid them at the feet of the Ruler of the Universe—He who alone can judge the nations with equity and the people with His truth. God grant a favorable answer to those prayers—but how can we tell—who knows but that in His almighty and far-seeing judgment He intends through these means to bind our federated nation closer together than any nation ever yet was bound, and so there may yet be war—but if so, it will be a war that waged, as it will be, only

for the sake of justice and right of man and punishment of crime, will and can but bring with it victory, and victory crowned with honor in the eyes of all our fellow-men, to be followed by peace which will be indeed peaceful, and not merely as it has been for years and is now when men cry "Peace, peace, but there is no peace."

And so let our ministers of Christ—brave army always in battle array in the great war that never ceases against mankind—remember as they pray, that it may be only by the blessings of war that we can overcome the horrors of peace.

Let them remember as they pray that rights of citizenship and of mankind are sacred and must be protected, even though sacrifice of life and happiness be for a time involved.

Let them remember as they pray that in the Gospel which they preach there is not one word, from the beginning to the end, in condemnation of a war of justice.

Let them remember as they pray that the Prince of Peace is likewise the God of Battles.

Let them remember as they pray that the disciple loved above all others, and who on the last eventful night rested his head on that bosom so full of untold love for man, saw his dear Lord come again when the heavens opened and the Faithful and the True, on the great white horse of the Apocalypse, rode with vestures dipped in blood and drawn sword in hand, followed by all the mounted hosts of heaven, judging and waging war in righteousness, and treading out the wine-press of the wrath of God.

And, as they pray, let them follow the example of one of New York's ablest and most eminent divines, who, on a recent Sabbath during this impending crisis, at a service enriched by the dedication of a noble organ, fit instrument to accompany alike the song of thankfulness for peace at home, or battle-songs of soldiers of God and nations as they march to victory, prayed that through the help of the Almighty this country might be preserved in peace—YEA, O LORD, PRESERVED IN PEACE, IF THOU WILT—BUT ABOVE ALL—IN HONOR.

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